

# Religion Census Newsletter

November, 2017

## Where Religious Groups are Largest—or Strongest

The [U.S. Religion Census](#) is most often used to report religious data within individual counties\*. It is the best source for comparative county-level data across the nation. With this data available, it is then easy to compile the data at state and metropolitan area levels.

Our [Lists & Rankings](#) page allows users to compile information for any participating religious group at the county or state or metropolitan area level.

We have the number of congregations for 236 separate religious groups in 2010.

For most of these, we also have adherent\*\* statistics, used for making reasonable comparisons between groups with different membership standards and practices.

Many groups also report their average weekly attendance figures for each county. Since some of the largest groups are not able to provide these figures, we do not routinely include them in our reports. But those figures are still available on-line when looking at a particular religious group.

For example, here are the five **largest** states for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2010 in each category:

State	Congregations	State	Adherents	State	Attendees
Pennsylvania	1,011	Pennsylvania	241,659	California	84,066
North Carolina	710	North Carolina	185,669	Pennsylvania	83,604
New York	679	California	170,641	North Carolina	66,342
Ohio	560	Texas	155,046	Florida	63,107
California	553	Florida	127,670	Texas	46,564

*To obtain the complete list for any group, see the instructions at the end of the newsletter.*

So which state is the largest for this Protestant denomination? Pennsylvania has the most churches and the most adherents. But in a typical week, California's PC(USA) churches will have more attendees than those in any other state.

Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and California are among the top five states in all three categories. These, and the other four states that appear on at least one of the lists, are all among the ten most populous states in the country. Many national groups will have similar patterns.

Totaling the congregations, adherents, or attendance will tend to put the areas with the greatest population at the top of the lists.

By the same token, the state with the highest number of high-school dropouts is California, the state with the most number of households making less than \$10,000 a year is California, and the state with the largest number of people working on farms, in forests, or fishing—is again California. But the actual percentage of people in two of those categories is very small in California. (Trivia question: For which of those three categories does California actually have the highest percentage of any state? See the footnote section for the answer\*\*\*)

So rather than asking “Where are religious groups the largest?”, we could instead ask “Where are religious groups the strongest?” That usually means, “Where do they represent the largest proportion of the population?”

The same spreadsheet that gives the raw numbers for each group also includes the population figure from the same census period. This allows ready calculation for relative concentration within the geographic area.

Applying those calculations to the same figures for PC(USA), these become their **strongest** states:

State	Congregations per 100,000	State	Adherents per 100,000	State	Attendees per 100,000
WestVirginia	10.6	SouthCarolina	1,969	South Carolina	754
SouthDakota	10.1	NorthCarolina	1,947	North Carolina	696
Iowa	9.3	Pennsylvania	1,902	Pennsylvania	658
NorthDakota	8.0	Iowa	1,687	Iowa	563
Pennsylvania	8.0	Nebraska	1,551	Nebraska	556

*For instructions on computing these ratios for any group, see the instructions at the end of the newsletter.*

The same principle of largest vs. strongest can be applied to any group in a variety of geographies.

Counties, states, and metropolitan areas are already available on-line.

Denominational boundaries (mentioned in the [July, 2017, Newsletter](#)) are another means of reporting statistics.

Our data office has also worked with newspaper circulation areas and media markets, and is available to assist with other definitions as questions arise.

Researchers, analysts, students, reporters, and many others rely on the U.S. Religion Census for subnational religious counts. These reports are available for anyone interested in specific groups, and complete data sets are used by those studying a broader spectrum of groups.

But all these comparisons depend on data supplied by individual groups. This is why we are counting on people like YOU to encourage your own religious group to take part in the 2020 study.

*\*As in nearly all national research, “counties” is a broad term that includes the District of Columbia, Louisiana’s parishes, independent cities in several states, and boroughs and census divisions in Alaska. The more correct phrase is “counties or equivalents,” but many reports use the verbal shorthand of “counties.”*

*\*\*Adherents: Every participating group is asked to provide an actual count or an estimate of the number of people associated with each local congregation. This number is termed “adherents.” Ideally, adherents include all regular participants and/or all those regarding that congregation as their spiritual home. This is done because religious traditions differ in whether they would include children and regular*

worshippers in their normal membership counts; and some traditions do not even have a membership category.

For specific adherent definitions for a particular group, see [Appendix A](#) on our [Methods](#) web page. For the general definition used when a group didn't have a specific adherent figure, see page xvi of the [introductory material](#).

**\*\*\*Latest figures from the American Community Survey indicate that 18.2% of Californians at least 25 years old have not completed high school. This is the largest percentage of any state.**

Every decade the US Religion Census tries to include additional religious groups, making the US Religion Census increasingly accurate. The 236 groups that took part in 2010 are listed [online](#). If you know of other faith groups that would like to participate and be included in this census effort, please [send us](#) the group's contact information or contact person.

Meanwhile, over 6,200 people visited our website in October. Several have let us know how valuable this resource is, and how they are looking forward to the 2020 update. Naturally, we hope to include information from your group in the 2020 counts.



[www.asarb.com](http://www.asarb.com)

Published by the [Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies](#), sponsor of the U.S. Religion Census

*This newsletter is intended for the following audiences:*

***Groups that participated in the 2010 Religion Census.*** *The newsletter is sent to the latest contact we have for the supplier of the statistics.*

***Groups that are eligible to participate in the upcoming 2020 Religion Census.*** *The newsletter is sent to the latest contact we have for the supplier of the statistics.*

***Members of the sponsoring agency for the Religion Census, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.***

***Those who requested to receive the newsletter through our website.***

### **How to get such lists for any participating religious group:**

Go to our [Lists & Rankings](#) page.

In the “By Individual Religious Group” box, choose the appropriate year. Most researchers prefer to use the latest available, which is currently 2010.

In the List field, choose the geography. This article has focused on states, but counties and metro areas are also available.

In the Religious Group field, choose the group you are interested in.

Click the Confirm Selection button.

*Not all groups took part each decade, but you will get a message to that effect if your group didn't supply data for the year you selected.*

Depending on your browser settings, you will either be notified that your data is available for download or the file will automatically open.

### **To compute ratios:**

*This example assumes you are using Microsoft's Excel for reviewing the data. Any spreadsheet program will have similar steps.*

Create three column headings to the right of the Population cell for Congregation Ratio, Adherent Ratio, and Attendance Ratio.

For States and Metro Areas,

In the first cell under Congregation Ratio, type “=B6/H6” (do not include the quotes). This will divide the number of congregations in the first state by the 2010 population of that state. OR, to make the ratio more understandable for most readers, type “=B6/(H6/100000)” (again, do not type the quotes). This will give you the ratio of congregations per hundred thousand people.

In the first cell under Adherent Ratio, type “=D6/H6” for the straight ratio of adherents to population, or “=D6/(H6/100000)” for the ratio to one hundred thousand people.

In the first cell under Attendance Ratio, type “=F6/H6” for the straight ratio of adherents to population, or “=F6/(H6/100000)” for the ratio to one hundred thousand people.

For Counties,

In the first cell under Congregation Ratio, type “=C6/I6” (do not include the quotes; the divisor is a capital i). This will divide the number of congregations in the first county by the 2010 population of that county. OR, to make the ratio more understandable for most readers, type “=C6/(I6/100000)” (again, do not type the quotes). This will give you the ratio of congregations per hundred thousand people.

In the first cell under Adherent Ratio, type “=D6/H6” for the straight ratio of adherents to population, or “=D6/(H6/100000)” for the ratio to one hundred thousand people.

In the first cell under Attendance Ratio, type “=F6/H6” for the straight ratio of adherents to population, or “=F6/(H6/100000)” for the ratio to one hundred thousand people.

Copy each of these cells down the column for each of the geographic rows.